

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 0060

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, NATO, GW

SUBJ: TANK HARMONIZATION - THE HIGH COST OF FAILURE

REF: (A) BONN 00237 DTG 051701Z JAN 77; (B) STATE 1409
DTG 042331Z JAN 77; (C) SECDEF 3140 DTG 282320Z DEC 76

1. WE NOTE THAT EMBASSY BONN'S ASSESSMENT OF PROBABLE FRG DOMESTIC REACTION AND POSSIBLE FUTURE COURSES OF ACTION ON US-FRG TANK HARMONIZATION (REF A), IN PREPARATION FOR SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HOFFMANN'S FORTHCOMING JANUARY 11-12 VISIT TO BONN ON THIS SUBJECT (REF B), CONCLUDES THAT THE FRG MAY WELL ELECT TO PRODUCE THE LEOPARD 2 INITIALLY WITH THE 120MM GERMAN SMOOTHBORE GUN, WITH A POSSIBLE OPTION TO ADOPT THIS OR ANOTHER WEAPON (EG. UK 120MM RIFLED GUN) JOINTLY WITH THE US AND UK AT A LATER DATE. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS COURSE OF ACTION, WERE IT TO MATERIALIZE, WOULD DEAL A BODY BLOW TO CONFIDENTIAL

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FLEDGLING ATTEMPTS WITHIN NATO TO IMPROVE THE INTEROPERABILITY OF WEAPONS SYSTEMS USED BY MORE THAN ONE ALLY WHICH MUST INHERENTLY OPERATE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT IS IMPERATIVE, AND WHERE THE ABILITY TO USE COMMON HIGH TONNAGE CONSUMABLES IS EQUALLY IMPERATIVE IF THIS FLEXIBILITY IS TO BE ACHIEVED.

2. AS WASHINGTON IS WELL AWARE, THE DESIRE TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED INTEROPERABILITY AND THEREAFTER TO INCREASE STANDARDIZATION AMONG NATO WEAPONS SYSTEMS FACES A NUMBER OF PERSISTENT OB-

STACLES, RANGING FROM ECONOMIC INTERESTS NARROWLY INTERPRETED TO EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT SCHEDULES WHICH DO NOT MESH. NATIONS ARE FREQUENTLY SO CLOSE TO PRODUCTION OF SYSTEMS THAT THEY ARE RELUCTANT TO MAKE COMPROMISES TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED INTEROPERABILITY OR, ALTERNATIVELY, THE SCHEDULED REPLACEMENT OF OTHER SYSTEMS IS SO DISTANT IN TIME THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEIZE POLICYMAKERS' ATTENTION TO ACHIEVE AGREEMENT ON COMMONALITY. MOREOVER, CONCENTRATION ONLY ON SYSTEMS WHICH ARE A DECADE OR SO AWAY FROM DEPLOYMENT APPEARS TO MANY TO BE AN ADMISSION THAT THE ALLIANCE CANNOT ACT PURPOSEFULLY AND QUICKLY TO SOLVE SERIOUS EQUIPMENT LIMITATIONS EVEN WHEN THE PROBLEM IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED.

3. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE US-FRG TANK HARMONIZATION PROGRAM HAS EMERGED AS THE BELLWETHER OF CURRENT EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED INTEROPERABILITY. IT IS SUBSTANTIVELY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT INVOLVES THE TWO LARGEST ALLIANCE PRODUCERS AND SUPPLIERS OF TANKS, PARTICULARLY FOR THE CENTRAL REGION. MOREOVER, IT IS PSYCHOLOGICALLY IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION THAT IT IS THE PRODUCT OF POLITICAL WILL IMPOSED UPON MILITARY BUREAUCRACIES AND OTHERS WHO WERE RELUCTANT OR UNABLE TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMON COMPONENTS WHEN THESE COMPONENTS ARE THEMSELVES HIGH VALUE COMBAT CONSUMABLES (E.G. ENGINES, TRACKS) OR ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH VALUE/TONNAGE CONSUMABLES (E.G. GUNS/AMMUNITION).

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4. I PRETEND TO NO SPECIAL EXPERTISE ON THE MERITS OF SMOOTH VS. RIFLED BORE TANK GUNS OR ON THE NEED OR LACK OF NEED TO UPGUN FROM 105MM TO 120MM. BUT I DO KNOW THAT AGREEMENT ON A COMMON TANK GUN OF SOME REPEAT SOME CALIBER AND TYPE AND ABLE TO USE THE SAME AMMUNITION IS WIDELY REGARDED AS A TEST OF THE SERIOUS INTENT OF THE US, FRG AND UK. WERE THE FRG TO DECIDE TO PRODUCE LEOPARD 2 WITH THE 120MM SMOOTH BORE GUN WHILE THE US (LARGELY BECAUSE OF CONGRESSIONAL INSISTENCE AS EXPLAINED IN REF C) AND THE UK (APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF DESIRE FOR FOREIGN SALES) AGREE TO STICK WITH A 105MM GUN UNTIL THE UK 120MM RIFLED BORE GUN IS DEVELOPED AND FULLY TESTED, TANK HARMONIZATION IN PARTICULAR AND INTEROPERABILITY EFFORTS IN GENERAL WILL BE WIDELY -- AND PERHAPS CORRECTLY -- REGARDED AS HAVING BEEN FORCED TO MARCH TO THE BEST ESTABLISHED BY ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND STRONG NATIONAL VIEWS OF WHAT IS BEST FOR A GIVEN COUNTRY RATHER THAN WHAT IS BEST FOR THE ALLIANCE.

5. I SUGGEST THAT SECRETARY HOFFMANN MIGHT WELL POINT OUT TO OUR ALLIES IN BONN THIS UNDESIRABLE OUTCOME AND OUR DESIRE TO AVOID IT. THE US, BY ADOPTION OF A HYBRID TURRET -- WHICH CAN ACCEPT THE 105MM GUN UNTIL THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION IS CLEARER, THEN ALSO ACCEPT EITHER 120MM GUN CANDIDATE, AT ANY FUTURE DATE AND WITHOUT UNREASONABLE ADDITIONAL COST -- HAS PUT ITSELF IN A POSITION TO KEEP THE FUTURE OPEN IN A WAY

THAT DOES NOT FORECLOSE STANDARDIZATION ON SOME REPEAT SOME
GUN. I SUGGEST THAT IT WOULD NOT BE UNREASONABLE TO PRESSURE
OUR ALLIES IN BONN TO DEVELOP LEOPARD 2 WITH A SIMILAR HYBRID
TURRET TO ACHIEVE THE SAME ENDS. WE COULD THEN NEGOTIATE A
THREE-POWER AGREEMENT (OR FOUR-POWER, SHOULD FRANCE ELECT TO
PARTICIPATE) SETTING FORTH THE RULES BY WHICH ALL WOULD DETER-
MINE THE MOST ACCEPTABLE TANK GUN AND COMMITTING ALL TO
ADHERE TO THESE RULES. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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